

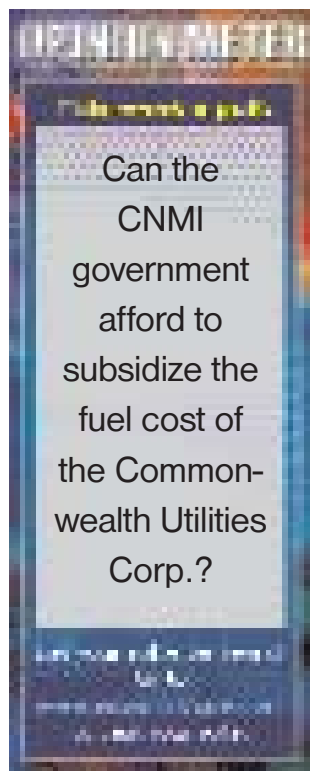
Saipan Tribune

CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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POLL RESULTS

Is the CNMI government doing enough to enforce the anti-littering law?*

YES - 11

NO - 417

*As of Monday, Nov. 22, 2004, 4:14pm.

INSIDE



53 Killed

A passenger plane crashed in an ice-covered lake in northern China seconds after takeoff Sunday, killing all 53 people aboard and one person on the ground after an apparent midair explosion, the government said.

Two projects eyed for Outer Cove Marina

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

At least two development projects in Outer Cove Marina can be realized once the government takes over its operation from Marine Revitalization Corp.

Lt. Gov. Diego T. Benavente, in a recent letter to the Legislature, said that the National Park Service "is already negotiating to buy out its franchise agreement and develop the land portion of Outer Cove."

At the same time, Benavente said

that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has expressed willingness to construct a breakwater on the waters off the marina "but not until the Commonwealth regains control of the property."

"It is therefore critical that the government acquire possession [of the proper-

ty]. Without that, no further development of Outer Cove is possible," he said.

Benavente is pushing for the Legislature's approval of a \$3-million settlement agreement between MRC, represented by businessman Anthony Pellegrino, **See TWO on Page 12**

Budget panel OKs \$217M

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

The legislative conference committee that was created to tackle the budget has agreed on a \$217 million funding level for the government this fiscal year.

House committee chair Rep. Oscar M. Babauta said the committee agreed in principle to consider the \$5.1 million in additional revenues submitted by the Executive Branch.

Committee members, however, have yet to decide on how much would be given to individual agencies. One strong proposal, he said, comes from the Rota and Tinian lawmakers, who want to get at least \$500,000 for each island to pay off retroactive salaries, as espoused by the House budget bill.

"The [lawmakers] see the need to continue what the House has initiated; that is, reserving certain amount to start [paying off the] Rota and Tinian government employees' retroactive pay," he said.

He said panel members "pretty much agreed to fund it from the general fund."

See BUDGET on Page 12



Babauta



SHAN SEMAN

A CACHE OF BOOKS

Kevin Latham, director of the Joeten-Kiyu Public Library, presents a certificate of appreciation to Soka Gakkai International vice president Richard Sasaki after receiving over 100 books yesterday, courtesy of the Soka Gakkai International organization.

Bush sets aside \$15.5M to fight BTS

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

President Bush has signed the Brown Tree Snake Control and Eradication Act of 2004 into law, setting aside up to \$15.5 million from fiscal years 2006 to 2010 to intensify the campaign against the economic pest that has plagued Guam and threatens other Pacific islands, in-



Bush

cluding the CNMI.

The new law calls for the expansion of interagency and intergovernmental rapid response teams in the CNMI, Guam, Hawaii, Palau, Marshall Islands,

and Micronesia.

The law authorizes the allotment of funds to improve efforts to control the spread of the snake population from Guam to neighboring Pacific territories and freely associated states; its eventual goal is to eradicate millions of brown tree snakes on Guam.

It also expands research into chemical,

See BUSH on Page 12

HPMR backs patient referrals to Manila

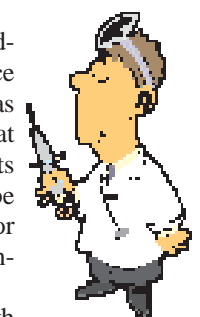
By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

Hawaii Pacific Medical Referral vice president Thomas Cannon agrees that referring patients to Manila would be much cheaper for the CNMI government.

"Compared with Hawaii, it's definitely cheaper in the Philippines," he said, noting that health care cost in Manila is about a fifth of the average price in Hawaii.

HPMR, the third party administra-

See HPMR on Page 12



Local

CUC inks \$1.3M deals on delinquent accounts

By AGNES E. DONATO
REPORTER

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. scored a partial victory in its debt collection, after reaching settlement agreements binding several delinquent customers to pay \$1.3 million.

CUC executive director Lorraine Babauta said the agreements, which were executed over the past month, involve several large disputed accounts. The payments will be made in installments that will enhance CUC's revenues in the coming months.

"This is a major improvement in our accounts receivable situation," she said.

Further, Babauta said the

utility firm, pursuant to a court order, continues to negotiate with the CNMI government regarding the latter's approximately \$15-million debt to the utility firm.

The government has disputed this amount and accused CUC of overcharging.

In a public notice issued in relation to the proposed 3.5-cent fuel surcharge, CUC said it is now up to the court to decide whether the government owes CUC. "In other words, CUC cannot count on collecting from the government in the near future and may not be able to collect it all if the court's decision is in favor of the government," the firm said.

Meanwhile, CUC has be-

come aggressive in clearing up all outstanding account, Babauta said. She expressed hope that all outstanding billing disputes will be resolved in the coming year through the efforts of the Central Processing Unit, which will be based in CUC's Dandan payment center.

In an earlier interview, she said the Nov. 30 closure of the Garapan and San Jose payment centers and the establishment of a central processing section is expected to improve CUC's handling of disputes and other customer concerns.

"We want the public to know that even though we must ask our customers to bear some of the increased fuel costs, we are addressing our other operational

needs through an aggressive effort to recover all debts owed to CUC," Babauta said.

She also asked anyone with a delinquent balance to come in to discuss a payment plan as soon as possible.

CUC is pursuing receivables through legal actions, administrative hearings, and other collection efforts.

The firm noted that some of these bills are uncollectible, as they are owed by companies that have left the island or by people or businesses that do not have the ability to pay.

Other accounts will be collected through promissory notes, which will provide CUC a stream of income but not lump sum payments, CUC said.



BROADWAY STAR

BING E. CHAVEZ

Tony awardee and former *Miss Saigon* star Lea Salonga held a two-night, sold-out concert at the University of Guam Fieldhouse on Friday and Saturday last week. Salonga played the role of Kim in *Miss Saigon* in performances in London, where she won the Laurence Olivier Award. From London, she went to Broadway, where she garnered the Tony, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Awards. She also won the Theatre World Award. Salonga is the singing voice of the characters Princess Jasmine in the Walt Disney animated classics *Aladdin* (*A Whole New World*) and *Mulan* (*Reflection*).

Youth group donates to charity

Wishing to make Thanksgiving a more meaningful occasion, about 30 young individuals from the Garapan Youth Learning Center began a food drive earlier this month, soliciting and collecting canned goods that would be donated to a charity of their choice.

The food drive, which began on Nov. 8 and ended last Friday, resulted in the collection of 72 canned goods and a sack of rice from 16 families. The foodstuffs were donated yesterday to the Guma Esperanza.

"Not a lot of us are lucky enough to have money to buy this food," said 11-year-old Aderwyn Gomez. "My mother always told me that it's better to give than to receive, and I feel good knowing that I can share my blessings with other people."

Gomez said the selection of Guma Esperanza was based on the group's feeling toward assisting battered women. During

a voting process, majority of the group favored donating the foodstuffs to the American Red Cross but were told that ARC does not accept canned good donations. Guma Esperanza received the second most votes, while the Juvenile Detention Unit was third.

"The people there need help with food," Gomez said. "We wanted to give the canned goods to all three organizations, but that wasn't possible, so we voted. It is alright because we could at least help those battered women and children."

Program coordinator Mary Ann Lizama said the group annually holds Thanksgiving drives, with this year being the third drive relating to the holiday.

The group is also preparing for an upcoming Christmas caroling visits. They also participate in beach cleanups every first Saturday of the month. (*Shan Seman*)

JOLLIBEE

Island Snapshots

The Saipan Tribune accepts unsolicited photos of holidays, weddings, baptisms, and other community and family events for free publication. Material submitted should be original and not copyrighted, in digital or print format. Most include a caption containing complete details (a description of the event, location of the persons in the picture, the date, and the place), the name of the contributor, and a contact number. The Saipan Tribune reserves the right to edit the caption, the date of publication and the date of the picture. Contributors can e-mail their submissions to editor@saipantribune.com. To check if contributions are received, call 223-6207, 223-3446, or 223-8743.

Only 11 workers deemed eligible for Chaba aid

By AGNES E. DONATO
REPORTER

A week before the deadline for application, only 11 local workers have so far been deemed eligible for federal aid distributed to individuals who missed or lost work as a result of Supertyphoon Chaba.

Employment Services and Training director Alfred Pangelinan, who runs the Disaster Unemployment Assistance program in the CNMI, said the successful applicants stand to receive amounts corresponding to the length of time they were out of work after Chaba hit the islands in August.

Pangelinan said all of these workers are from Saipan. The Department of Labor has yet to receive information from its Tinian and Rota offices.

The amounts approved so far range from one week to 13 weeks worth of earnings, he said. He estimated that the workers would be getting over \$5,000 total.

Under the program, resident workers may receive up to \$250 for each week that they lost wages as a result of the typhoon.

The biggest amount will be granted to a self-employed individual who has been out of business since the typhoon. The businessman could get compensation for up to 26 weeks in lost earnings, provided that he presents proof of his efforts to get

the business running.

The number of successful applicants is far lower than the over 500 potential applicants that the Labor Department had expected to avail of the federal aid.

According to Pangelinan, his office received over 100 calls from people inquiring about the requirements and application procedure. However, only about 40 people actually registered with the agency. At least seven of these applicants have been found ineligible, while the rest are awaiting review.

Pangelinan said some applicants were disqualified because they failed to meet the one-week unemployment requirement set by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which administers the program.

Applicants who missed work in order to clean up or fix their home following the typhoon were also deemed ineligible. Pangelinan explained that the unemployment must result from damage to the jobsite, not the worker's home.

The Department of Labor has been accepting applications for the assistance since Nov. 1. The last day for submission of applications is next Tuesday, Nov. 30.

"I remind everyone who has been affected by the disaster to submit application on or before Nov. 30. Anyone who files a claim after the deadline will

have to present justification for the late filing. At no cost will we accept applications after Feb. 26 [when the 26-week program period ends]," Pangelinan said.

The Disaster Unemployment Assistance program was made available to Commonwealth residents as a result of President Bush's declaration of the CNMI as a major disaster area.

Those who may qualify for the federal grant are workers and self-employed individuals whose employment have been lost or interrupted as a result of the typhoon.

The assistance is limited to U.S. citizens or nationals who:

- were living and working in the affected areas at the time of the disaster;
- were unable to get to their jobsite or self-employment location because they must travel through the affected area and were prevented from doing so as a result of the disaster;
- were to begin employment or self-employment, but were prevented by the disaster;
- became the breadwinner or major support of a household because of the death of the previous head of household due to the disaster;
- could not work or perform services in self-employment because of injury sustained as a direct result of the disaster.
- could not work or perform services because of physical damage or destruction to the jobsite as a direct

result of the disaster; or

- lost a majority of income or revenue because the employer or self-employed business was damaged, destroyed, or closed by the federal government.

Documents required for processing of applications include previous year's income tax return, Social Security card, payroll records or earnings statement of the last payday prior to the disaster, and a copy of business license, if applicable.

Aside from the financial assistance, the Division of Employment Services & Training will provide help through its referral and job placement program.

"As the Disaster Unemployment Assistance Program is temporary, the referral and job placement assistance will assist unemployed workers in obtaining employment," according to the Labor Department.

PHI

PATA exec to speak at MVA meeting

Marianas Visitors Authority members will have a chance to know more about the benefits of linking up with the Pacific Asia Travel Association and get updated on the travel industry situation during MVA's membership meeting next month.

MVA has invited PATA vice president Peter Semone to be the guest speaker at the Dec. 7 meeting at the Fiesta Hall of Hafa Adai Beach Hotel.

According to information provided by MVA, Semone oversees business development for PATA. He is supported by a global team of regional directors based in Bangkok, San Francisco, Frankfurt, and Sydney.

Before joining PATA in May 2002, Semone spent over a decade in Indonesia where he founded a destination management company to serve the logistical requirements of international cruise liners plying the seas of Indonesia.

He also helped develop several adventure tour products on Bali. He served as a strategic consultant for the Indonesian Ministry of Culture and Tourism, as well as numerous private sector companies and is a frequent lecturer in destination management and tourism economics.

Semone holds a BA in Inter-



Semone

national Relations from the University of Pennsylvania and an MMH in Tourism Development from Cornell University's School of Hospitality Management.

"As our guest speaker, Mr. Semone will provide the MVA members a unique opportunity to connect with the leading authority on travel and tourism in the Pacific Asia region," said MVA managing director Vicky I. Benavente.

Attendees of the general membership meeting can also expect to receive presentations on topics to include the Approved Destination Status from the People's Republic of China, strategic marketing plans, and promotional campaigns for Fiscal Year 2005, Benavente said.

(Agnes E. Donato)

PIC



S&NISWCD meeting in December

The Saipan & Northern Islands Soil and Water Conservation District would like to inform the public of a meeting to be held on Dec. 7, 2004, at 1:30pm at the Natural Resources Conservation Service Office. For more information call 234-6170.

Free conference on domestic violence

The Domestic Violence Conference Steering Committee will be hosting a Domestic Violence Conference on Dec. 2 and 3, 2004 (Thursday and Friday) at the Hyatt Regency SandCastle. Admission is free. Some of the topics are Dynamics of Domestic Violence, Temporary Restraining Order Process, the new Domestic Violence Law, and the Criminal Justice System’s Response to Domestic Violence. Seating is limited so call as soon as possible to register. For more information contact Patrick Diaz at 236-9783, Ursula Aldan at 236-9868, or Esther Milne at 323-1954.

CCLPC commissioners meeting notice

The Chamorro/Carolinian Language Policy Commission will conduct its regular meeting on Friday, Dec. 3, 2004, at 1pm, at the Office on Aging Conference Room. The public is invited to attend this meeting. For more information, contact the Language Commission Office at 288-5321/26/27.

Wanted: designated drivers

The Department of Public Safety Traffic Section will again implement its Designated Driver program this December to promote road safety during the holiday season. The program provides transportation for intoxicated individuals. Instead of driving while intoxicated, individuals may contact the Traffic Section and a driver will be provided for transportation home. Those interested in taking part in the program are encouraged to contact Rose Ada-Hocog or Sgt. Sylvan Rangamar at 664-9084/5/6.

Students to send letters to NMI soldiers

Public and private school students in the Commonwealth are writing holiday letters to CNMI military personnel who won’t be home in the CNMI for the holidays. The letters are part of Project Holiday Cheer, which is being sponsored by the Office of the Governor, the Public School System, the Office of Military and Veterans Affairs, VFW Post 3457, the Pacific STAR Center for Young Writers, and the Pacific STAR Young Writers Foundation. Packets will include letters and a t-shirt designed by one of the student illustrators. “If you have a family member or know someone in the military who won’t be home for the holidays, please provide us with an address so a packet can be mailed from the CNMI community,” project organizers said in a statement. Individuals can page Katharyn Tuten-Puckett at 236-READ and she will return the call to get the address.

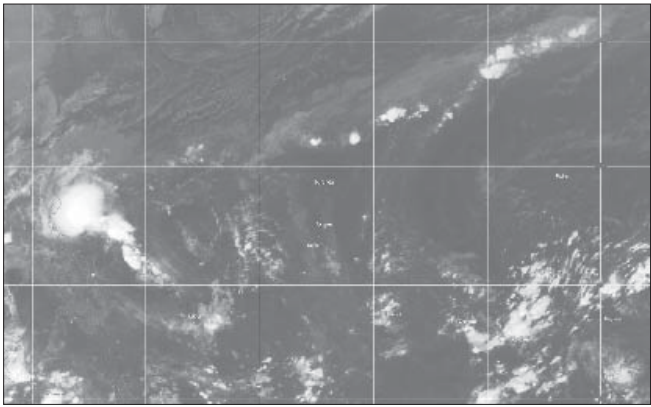
Deadline set for EAP scholarship

The Educational Assistance Program Winter/Spring 2005 deadline is Dec. 15, 2004. EAP is for those who have completed their high school requirement and desires to pursue a postsecondary education (certificate to bachelor’s degree). EAP provides funding to assist defray educational cost for eligible individuals for the following program:

- on-island/offisland enrolled at an accredited institution as a full-time status;
- on-island fulltime employee who desires to pursue a postsecondary education on a part-time status;
- on-island students taking courses online which are not offered at Northern Marianas College.

Upon availability of funds, EAP offers financial assistance for the following programs: Graduate, Juris Doctor or Doctor of Medicine. Application must be received or postmarked no later than Dec. 15, 2004. If you have submitted an application for Fall 2004, the application is still valid. Supporting documents (may be submitted at a later date) are U.S. passport and/or birth certificate issued by the court, an acceptance letter into the school you plan to attend, the most recent official sealed transcript and proof of 2002 & 2003 CNMI residency. Additionally, other scholarship application for the 2004/2005 is now available. Log on to www.cnmischolarship.com for more details.

WEATHER FORECAST



PICTURE TIME: 1:00 PM., NOVEMBER 22, 2004
Western North Pacific between Equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A shearline south of Iwo Jima extends southwestward from 25n152e to 19n130e. Cloudiness and rain extend along and 100 miles north of this line. Convergent low-level flow ahead of the shearline is producing a line of showers 120 miles wide from 20n142e to 25n155e. A monsoon trough stretches from near 9n130e to a weak circulation south of Yap near 7n139e to a circulation southeast of Majuro near 4n178e...to beyond the dateline at 3n. Convergent west winds into the weak circulation south of Yap are producing scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms between the Equator and 5n from 140e to 144e. Trade-winds converging into the circulation southeast of Majuro are generating scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms between 7n and 13n from 161e to 178e. Convergent west winds into the circulation are causing scattered showers in Pohnpei and Kosrae states and in the Republic of the Marshall Islands...between the Equator and 4n from 159e to 170e.

SAIPAN AND TINIAN
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Northeast at 10-15 mph.
Temperature: Highs around 87.
Lows around 76.

GUAM AND ROTA
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Northeast at 15-20 mph.
Temperature: Highs around 86.
Lows around 77.

PALAU
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: North at 5-10 kt.

POHNPEI
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Variable at 5-10 kt. becoming 10 kt.

YAP AND ULITHI
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: East at 5-10 kt.

KOSRAE
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Variable at 5 kt.

CHUUK
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Northeast at 5-10 kt.

MAJURO
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Southeast at 10-15 kt

CITY	FORECAST	HIGH	LOW
Auckland	Sunny	67 F (19 C)	53 F (12 C)
Beijing	Partly Cloudy	52 F (11 C)	33 F (1 C)
Hong Kong	Sunny	75 F (24 C)	66 F (19 C)
Honolulu	Showers	82 F (28 C)	70 F (21 C)
London, England	Cloudy	54 F (12 C)	47 F (8 C)
Los Angeles	Sunny	65 F (18 C)	48 F (9 C)
Manila	Rain	83 F (28 C)	73 F (23 C)
Melbourne	Partly Cloudy	66 F (19 C)	52 F (11 C)
Miami	Partly Cloudy	83 F (28 C)	72 F (22 C)
New York City	Partly Cloudy	54 F (12 C)	46 F (8 C)
Osaka	Sunny	54 F (12 C)	40 F (4 C)
Paris	Cloudy	45 F (9 C)	39 F (4 C)
Pusan	Sunny	61 F (16 C)	46 F (8 C)
Rome	Partly Cloudy	60 F (16 C)	48 F (9 C)
Salem, Oregon	Partly Cloudy	48 F (9 C)	42 F (6 C)
San Francisco	Sunny	62 F (17 C)	48 F (9 C)
Seoul	Sunny	56 F (13 C)	40 F (4 C)
Tokyo, Japan	Partly Cloudy	58 F (14 C)	48 F (9 C)
Washington, DC	Partly Cloudy	58 F (14 C)	44 F (7 C)

4 persons face theft charges

The Attorney General's Office yesterday charged four persons with theft in three separate cases at the Superior Court.

In one of the cases, CNMI chief prosecutor lodged conspiracy and theft by extortion charges against Bivenvenido Patawaran Jr., 30, and Jennifer Patawaran, 25, of Chinatown.

Hutton said the Patawarans obtained another's property sometime from Aug. 31 to Oct. 14 by threatening one Mark A. Wallace of criminal prosecution for the latter's debt.

In doing this, Hutton said the Patawarans extracted approximately 10 times the amount of money originally claimed by them from Wallace, in exchange for abstaining from filing criminal charges against the debtor.

In another case, the prosecutor charged Mario F.N. Corpus, 43, of Susupe, with theft by deception.

Corpus, an official of a Filipino organization, allegedly solicited some \$750 to purchase basketball uniforms and to pay for the registration in a basketball league organized by the United Filipino Organization. Hutton said Corpus never turned over the money to UFO.

Hutton charged Lilia Bisda David, 50, of Kannat Tabla, with theft in a separate case.

David allegedly stole some \$1,836.50 in cash from Orchid's Poker in Garapan last Sept. 26. *(John Ravelo)*

Another delinquent SBA loan lands in court

Delinquent disaster loans acquired from the U.S. Small Business Administration are flooding the court, as many debtors continue to default on their debts.

Lawyer Bruce Mailman filed another civil action yesterday on behalf of Texas firm LPP Mortgage, Ltd. to collect on a delinquent disaster loan.

Mailman earlier said his law firm is handling some 90 cases on behalf LPP, which had acquired rights over the loans from the SBA.

The new civil action impleaded Edward A. and Dorothy S. Concepcion as defendants.

In the complaint, Mailman said the Concepcions issued the SBA a promissory note in the amount of \$23,100 plus interest in February 1995 after acquiring a disaster loan. The Concepcions mortgaged a 3,085-square meter lot on Saipan to secure the note.

LPP acquired rights over the loan, note and mortgage sometime in 2001. Mailman said the Concepcions defaulted on the loan payment, prompting LPP to notify them about it in October this year.

Worker's Compensation to pay deceased teacher

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

The NMI Retirement Fund's Workers' Compensation Commission has agreed to pay \$40,000 to the family of a Public School System teacher who died while on duty in 1992, following a court ruling and as recommended by the Attorney General's Office.

Fund administrator Karl T. Reyes said the commission, which operates under the Fund, initially wanted the AGO to appeal the decision, but the latter reportedly recommended that the matter be immediately settled.

"The AGO recommended that we go ahead and pay, and close it. But we can't pay more than \$40,000," said Reyes.

In a Sept. 23, 2004 decision, associate judge David A. Wiseman reversed WCC's denial of the claim filed by Antonio A. Santos on behalf of his deceased wife, PSS teacher Susana A. Santos, who died in February 1992 while on assignment on Tinian.

Wiseman ordered the payment of \$40,000 without any amount withheld plus interests. The judge also ruled that Santos is entitled to attorney's fee for all proceedings since 1993 when former WCC hearing officer Edward H. Manglona reversed his earlier decision.

Manglona, in an August 1993 hearing, had recommended the awarding of compensation to Santos, but he later reversed it in a "formal hearing" after then-WCC administrator Tomas Aldan appealed the first hearing.

The case was brought to court, resulting in the Superior Court affirming the WCC decision.

The Supreme Court, however, later reversed the WCC's and the

Superior Court's decisions, finding that compensation was due. The High Court then remanded the case to WCC for payment.

During discussions on how much to give the claimant, the administrator said that payments were only obligatory from the date of the Supreme Court's remand, and offered to pay the amount, minus 4 percent deduction.

The administrator also said that Santos was not entitled to pre- or post-judgment interest on the total amount, nor attorney's fees.

Santos appealed Aldan's decision in court. In response, WCC filed a counter-claim, accusing Santos of improperly raising new issues on appeal.

Wiseman, in his ruling, dismissed WCC's contention that Santos is not allowed to cite statutes and case law not previously used to support arguments made at the administrative level.

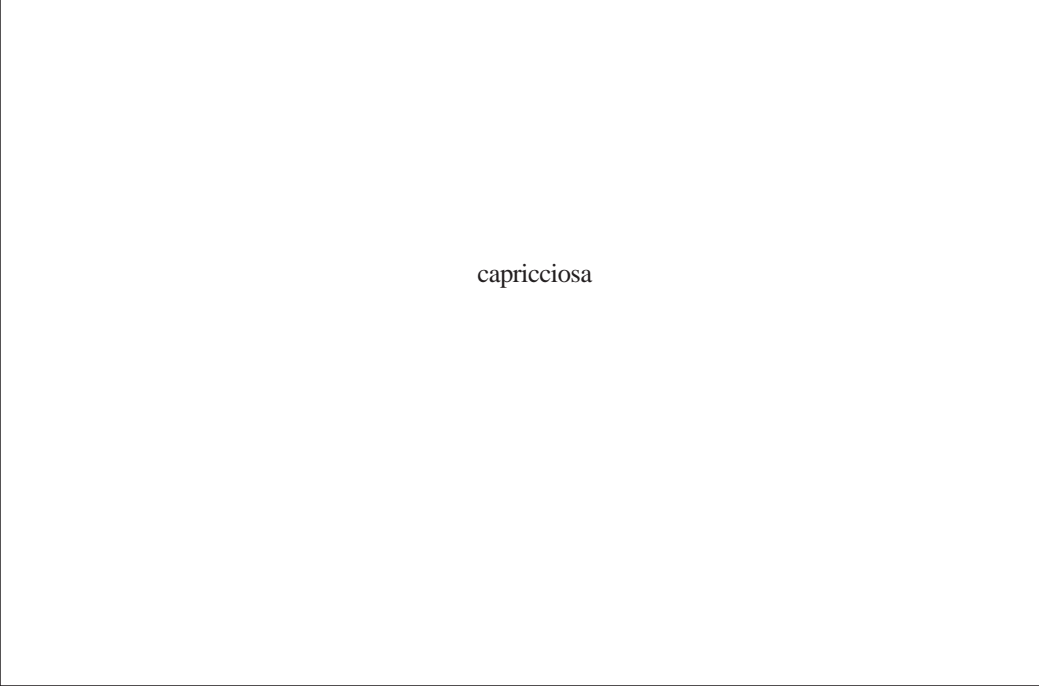
On the 4-percent deduction, Wiseman said that WCC ignored the fact that 4 CMC 9323, which provides for a 4-percent discount, applies to future payments that a claimant may wish to take early.

In Santos's case, he said the \$40,000 payment should have started being paid on a weekly basis beginning Feb. 19, 1992. If payment were made on a weekly basis, the entire amount would have been paid out by Aug. 16, 1997, or more than five years ago.

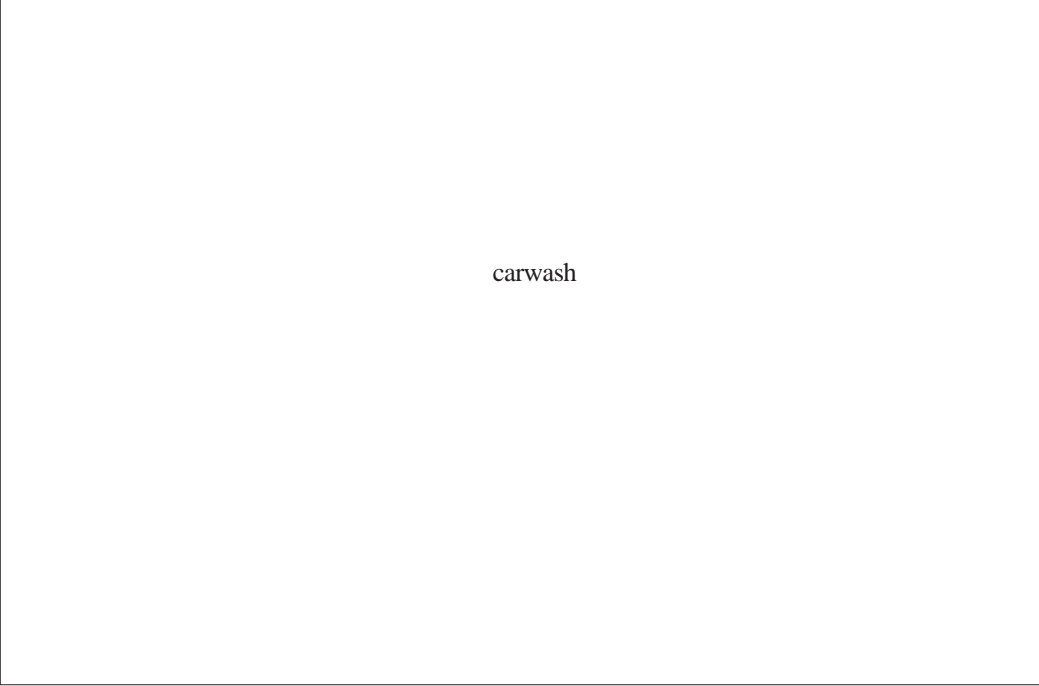
Further, the judge said that Santos, who is still attempting to collect money due after more than 10 years, is entitled to attorney's fees.

As of April 2004, Wiseman said that Santos has spent nearly \$24,000 in legal fees to exhaust administrative remedies, despite the appeals continually returning to the same decision maker.

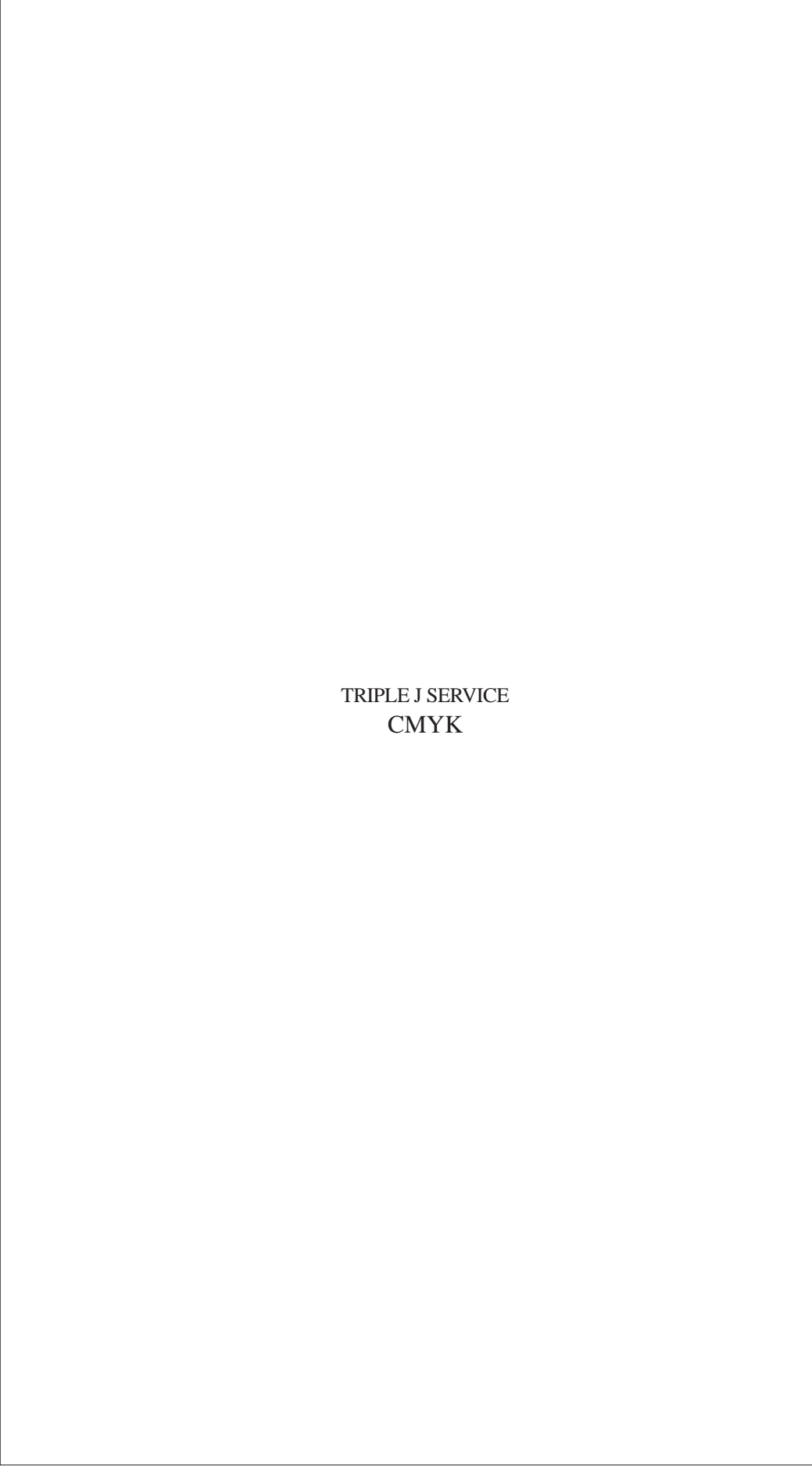
Meantime, Reyes said that Santos would have received the same amount over a decade ago.



capricciosa



carwash



TRIPLE J SERVICE
CMYK

Teacher of the Year to be named tomorrow

By SHAN SEMAN
REPORTER

Teachers, supporting aides, faculty, and officials from the Public School System will take part in the 13th Education Day celebration tomorrow at Kagman Elementary School.

According to planning committee chair Alfred Ada, the celebration will be highlighted with the awarding of the of 2004 Teacher of the Year, Supporting Staff-aid of the Year, and Supporting Staff of the Year.

“This is a day set aside for all educators to come together and celebrate education,” he said. “Whether in the classroom, at the central office pushing papers, cutting grass at the campus, or serving lunch, we’re all part of the Public School Sys-

tem with one goal, and we’ll always influence and be part of students’ memories.”

Ada said that under the Governor’s Education Initiative, the teacher of the year recipient would receive \$5,000 and will represent the Commonwealth at the national Teacher of the Year selection gathering in Washington D.C.

The recipient of the award would also attend a summer camp at the Kennedy Space Station in Houston, Texas.

The first runner-up would receive \$3,000 and the second runner-up, \$1,000.

“If you’re a teacher, then its sort of like a dream to receive the award,” Ada said.

He said 20 teachers were nominated for the award.

Ada said awards will also be

presented to students who won the theme and logo contests for the celebration. This year’s theme is “Wonders of Education and Capture Life’s Real Meaning.”

Live entertainment and food will be provided during the celebration, as well as various activities including tug-of-war, coconut husking, and relay race.

Ada said performances headed by teachers will also be featured, as well as a tribute to all soldiers deployed for war.

“It’s a good opportunity, and the only time where teachers and all involved with public schools will meet one another in a social setting. It’s a celebration,” Ada said.

Last year’s winning teacher was Brenda Schultz of Garapan Elementary School.

Pacific nurses air regional concerns

SUVA, Fiji (FijiSUN, PIR)—Efforts are underway to establish a network of nursing leaders in the South Pacific to ensure a more effective response to health challenges affecting countries in the region.

Head nurses of South Pacific governments will meet in Rarotonga when the South Pacific Forum convenes this week to address a number of issues that affects the work of nurses today.

Issues that need to be addressed include the migration of overseas nurses, midwives and the shortage of staff, the

threat of emerging diseases such as SARS, the rising rate of non-communicable diseases, the need for health system reforms, problems with health service delivery in rural areas, poor equipment, lack of essential drugs and the need for trained competent personnel.

“Unity, collaboration, networking, and leadership will facilitate a more effective nursing response to health issues and strengthen support among countries as well as joint projects between government nursing leaders and associations,” said Kathleen Fritsch, World

Health Organization regional adviser in nursing.

In some South Pacific countries, health problems are worsened by the continued high rate of maternal mortality, the high and rising rates of tuberculosis and malaria. The meet convenes every two years to enable nurses to share their interests, concerns and clinical knowledge.

The forum will also discuss innovative actions and opportunities for participations to explore nursing in environments unique to the South Pacific.

Ancient remains found at Kalabera Cave

The Kalabera Cave in Marpi has been temporarily closed to tourists beginning Friday last week after the discovery of ancient human remains at the site.

In a statement issued by the Historic Preservation Office of the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs, it said that the discovery prompted the closure so that the area can be fully assessed.

Human remains were discovered at the site on Wednesday, Nov. 17, by HPO Historian Genevieve Cabrera during taping for an upcoming segment of the indigenous language television show “Abiba I Lenggua-hita-Mwareiti Mwaliyasch.”

It is believed that the bones were unearthed as a result of erosion and possibly human traffic at the prominent ancient site, the statement said.

Kalabera Cave is the more publicly accessible site where prehistoric pictographs believed to have been made by ancient Chamorros have been found. The cave was also a Japanese defense position and civilian hideout during World War II.

“The Historic Preservation Office will be conducting an assessment of the site to determine the extent of human remains in the area. The site will remain closed to the public until further notice,” HPO said.

HPO is asking the public to refrain from visiting the site during the assessment period. The office is also contacting major tour groups to inform them of the site closure.

“Please respect the area and understand that HPO is doing its best to reopen the site as soon as possible,” said HPO director Epiphano E. Cabrera Jr. “Proper documentation and a full assessment of the site needs to be undertaken prior to its reopening.”

For more information, call the Historic Preservation Office, Department of Community and Cultural Affairs at 670-664-2120.



From right, chair Gregorio V. Deleon Guerrero; Dr. Hoa Van Nguyen, *Charlie Cat* boat captain; Jesus Curo and Quane Ly.

Council lauds Charlie Cat boat team

Charlie Cat boat (Guam Team) captain Dr. Hoa Van Nguyen and anglers Jesus Curo and Quane Ly were recently recognized for capturing the grand prize, the third place bill fish category, and the total weight category at the 20th annual Saipan International Fishing Tournament held last September.

The Saipan and Northern Islands Municipal Council passed a resolution praising Van Nguyen and his anglers for their successful efforts during the tournament.

Van Nguyen’s team caught a monster marlin at 519.40 lbs, winning for themselves \$10,000. They also placed third in the bill fish category at 129.19 lbs, getting the \$1,500 cash prize; and the total weight category at 370.77

lbs, for a \$2,500 cash prize.

Grand V’s boat captain Ray Dela Cruz and anglers Joe Guerrero and Joe Reyes caught the biggest/heaviest yellowfin at 55.07 lbs.

Despite these, Danny Agulto’s record in the bill fish category in 1997 at 624.43 lbs, and James Taitano’s record in the yellowfin category in 1990 at 106 lbs remained the standing records to break.

The 20th annual Saipan International Fishing Tournament finally kicked off on Sept. 11, 2004, at Saipan Smiling Cove Marina after being postponed due to Supertyphoon Chaba. Ninety-four boats from Palau, Guam, Rota, Tinian and Saipan participated in the challenge to

catch the winning prizes in each category before the time deadline on Sunday, Sept. 12, 2004.

“The members of the municipal council and the people of the CNMI join John M. San Nicolas, president, and the Saipan Fishing Association members in extending special recognition, congratulation and commendation to...the Charlie Cat Boa [team] for capturing the grand prize and other awards and wish them the best as they prepare for the 21st Annual Saipan International Fishing Tournament,” part of the resolution reads.

The resolution was certified by chair Gregorio V. Deleon Guerrero and vice chair David A. Indalecio and attested by secretary Antonia M. Tudela.

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Island Snapshots



WALK FOR DIABETES

Several participants during Saturday's 4th Annual Don't Be A Turkey Walk pose for a photo shortly after the event. The walk generated funds for the operation of the Commonwealth Diabetes Coalition.

SHAN SEMAN

CONSERVATION IS KEY

Staff of Department of Lands and Natural Resources pose in front of their display during Saturday's REACh Energy Fair at the Oleai Sports Complex parking lot. The group's presence was intended to educate the community of ways DLNR can assist with energy conservation.

SHAN SEMAN



BIRTHDAY COUPLE

Belated birthday greetings go to Kayla Santos Kaipat, who celebrated her birthday yesterday, while loads of "Happy birthday!" go to Dennis D. Cabrera, who celebrates his birthday today. With them in this picture is their son, Dennis Kaipat Cabrera Jr.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



MATHCOUNTS DONATION

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Mobil Oil Marianas Islands Inc. president Jeff Borja, right, donates a check for \$1,000 to CNMI Mathcounts coordinator Paul Baron, center. Mobil is sponsoring CNMI Mathcounts for the second time as a primary sponsor of "Excellence in Mathematics." For more information on the Mathcounts program or to become a sponsor or volunteer, contact Baron at 322-7814. At left is Cecile Bamba-Suda, Mobil Oil public relations/government affairs manager.

CUC NOTICE



BIRTHDAY BOY

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Miguel Lorenzo Dandan celebrates his 7th birthday with friends and family members at Capricciosa.

Opinion

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John Pangelinan PUBLISHER
Jayvee L. Vallejera EDITOR

MEMBER

AP The Associated Press

Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

Honest on Saudi Arabia

Make our ports safer

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Letter to the Editor

Cohen asked to intervene in pozzolan deal

By AGNES E. DONATO
REPORTER

Left out of the negotiations between the Marianas Public Lands Authority and the firm seeking to mine Pagan pozzolan, the watchdog group Pagan-Watch has turned to the federal government for help in stopping the talks.

PaganWatch leaders Cinta Kaipat and Peter J. Pangelinan Perez wrote U.S. Interior’s deputy assistant secretary for insular affairs David Cohen, asking the federal official to step in and influence MPLA to allow indigenous representation on the decision to mine Pagan.

In the letter, PaganWatch said MPLA has repeatedly refused to allow either the Pagan residents or the greater CNMI community to participate in the decision as to whether or not to allow Azmar International to mine their island.

“MPLA has made it clear that the decision of whether or not to issue a mining permit and the terms of the permit rests solely with them and that the indigenous people who own the land have no say in the matter.

“They do not allow us to see any documents, nor to know the terms discussed. Their meetings with Azmar take place behind close doors. Although the doors are closed to us, they are open to Azmar supporters,” PaganWatch said.

According to the group, these sup-

porters include Senate members who held meetings with Azmar president Kenneth Moore in Arizona and at Sen. Luis Crisostimo’s home on Saipan.

PaganWatch also decried the local government’s alleged unwillingness to stop MPLA from entering into a 15-day period of secret negotiations with Azmar International.

“We now recognize that undue pressure and manipulation is occurring at MPLA as a result of many political and personal relationships between board members and Azmar supporters. It appears that nothing we do at a local level is going to make any difference. So must look outside our local government for help,” PaganWatch said.

Further, the group stressed that its members do not have the extensive time and money to fight Azmar in federal court, noting the possibility that the matter would come to that level.

“We hope that by your intervention and influence the obvious unethical and illegal action of exclusion by MPLA can be stopped,” the group said.

Asked for his comment, MPLA commissioner Edward Deleon Guerrero said the agency will issue a statement today to clarify issues around the confidentiality agreement it executed with Azmar.

The agreement was made on Nov. 16 when, despite Azmar’s failure to turn in

majority of the documents it had earlier been required to submit, the MPLA board of directors authorized the staff to initiate talks using a draft conditional mining permit.

In its letter, PaganWatch reiterated that Pagan mining would result in adverse impact to the island’s environment.

“If Pagan is turned over for mining, there is little doubt that it means the end of the simple life that the residents of Pagan love and cherish. Because the permit requestor has no mining experience, and no secure funding for the project, there is great risk of significant and permanent harm to the land and surrounding waters as well,” the group said.

PaganWatch said the terms under which MPLA is currently considering Azmar’s mining permit would not benefit the Commonwealth even from an economic perspective.

“We have learned that the permit would send windfall profits from mining outside the region. The profit split gives only 7 percent of the revenues to the CNMI in return for strip-mining our island of 200 million tons of pozzolan worth between \$50 and \$100 per ton at today’s services and potentially much more in the future due to anticipated scarcity of pozzolan worldwide. Potentially billions [are] at risk!” PaganWatch said.

BUSH

From Page 1

biological, and other control techniques to significantly reduce the brown tree snake population. It mandates the establishment of pre-departure quarantine protocols for cargo and other items being shipped from Guam and any other U.S. location where the snakes may be present.

The law directs government agencies, including the Interior and Agriculture departments, to fund efforts to curb the brown tree snake population.

Guam Rep. Madeleine Z. Bordallo introduced the federal legislation in Congress on Nov. 7 last year. Bush signed the measure into law on Oct. 30, just before his re-election.

Now Public Law No. 108-384, the measure expresses the sense of Congress that “there is a need for better coordinated control, interdiction, research, and eradication of the brown tree snake.”

The law authorizes the appropriation of at least \$15.5 million for different agencies for each fiscal year from 2006 to 2010: not more than \$2.6 million for activities conducted through the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services, Operations; \$1.5 million, APHIS, Wildlife Services, National Wildlife Research Center, Methods Development; \$3 million, Office of Insular Affairs; \$2 million, Fish and Wildlife Service; and \$1.5 million, U.S. Geological Survey.

The Act authorizes the appropriation

of not more than \$3 million and \$1 million to the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior, respectively, to implement the establishment of quarantine protocols.

“Under the quarantine protocols system, federal quarantine, natural resource, conservation, and law enforcement officers and inspectors may enforce state and territorial laws regarding the transportation, possession, or introduction of any brown tree snake,” it states.

The law also defines the role of a technical working group, including the evaluation of territorial activities, programs and policies that are likely to promote the spread of the brown tree snakes, and the preparation of recommendations on how to amend them. It authorizes the appropriation to the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture not more than \$450,000 each for each of the fiscal years from 2006 to 2010 to support the technical working group.

Brown tree snakes have been a menace on Guam, wiping out the bird population on the island and tripping power lines that result in power outages. Authorities believe economic losses incurred by Guam due to the damage caused by these snakes amount to millions of dollars.

Scientifically known as *Boiga irregularis*, the snake is not endemic to the Northern Marianas, according to the Commonwealth’s Department of Lands and Natural Resources. There have been more than 56 sightings of brown tree snakes in the CNMI, besides 13 snakes that were actually caught and killed.

HPMR

From Page 1

tor for the NMI Retirement Fund’s group health insurance program, said it would in fact be advantageous for Saipan to have a liaison office in Manila.

Cannon was on Saipan last week to report on its claims processing work for the Fund. Cannon said that for three years beginning Aug. 1, 2001 to July 31, 2004, HPMR saved the CNMI over \$8 million in earned discounts from health providers in Hawaii.

Of the total charges, \$29.8 million

was for off-island claims, while \$9.5 million was for local claims. Of these amounts, the Fund only paid \$7.4 million for off-island claims and \$6.7 million for on-island claims.

Earlier, Lt. Gov. Diego T. Benavente, who took part in negotiations with a Manila hospital for the CNMI referral program, said the government can save a lot of money if it refers its patients to the Philippines due to its close proximity and relatively low health care cost.

Under the referral program, the CNMI government guarantees patients’ hospitalization in offshore hospitals

and charges the patients either through their insurance or personal credit.

Records showed that since 1999, majority of patients referred for off-island treatment were sent to Guam. Of the 2,515 medical referral patients, 1,321 of them sought medical care in Guam-based health care facilities.

The next highest number of patients—1,149—were referred to Hawaii. The Philippines received 45 patients during the same period.

The DPH medical referral program has listed 15 accredited health care providers on Guam, 12 in Hawaii, and three in Manila.

BUDGET

From Page 1

Babauta, meantime, said that the joint committee has asked the Attorney General’s Office to submit an opinion explaining the nature of the \$50 increase in the labor fee for nonresident workers.

He confirmed that the committee was advised not to use the money that would be raised from the increased fees—totaling \$1.5 million—in view of possible litigation.

“We’ve heard from legal counsels from the community that this issue would be up for litigation. Some groups are questioning the imposition of the fee. There’s a question whether the increase is a tax or a fee,” he said.

The Department of Labor implemented the increase in the labor fee from \$225 to \$275 last July.

Meanwhile, Babauta said that the committee has approved to add a new judiciary division called Court Administration, but this, he noted, does not require additional funding.

“There’s no increase for the Judiciary. What would happen is that both the Supreme Court and the Superior Court

would put together this office, a new aspect of the Judiciary that the committee had approved,” he said.

The Judiciary, he said, will keep its 2003 funding level of over \$5 million.

Babauta said the committee also tried “to untangle” a Senate provision which allocates any unused funds from the Office of the Public Auditor’s 1 percent deduction to the Public School System. This is to compensate for the \$2 million that the Senate had cut from the House-approved budget for PSS.

“The Senate version actually [took out] \$2 million from PSS but the Senate has this companion provision which allows the PSS to receive beyond its budget by getting OPA’s unspent funds,” he said.

As far as the House panel is concerned, he said, it prefers to keep its budget for PSS at over \$38 million.

The House approved \$38 million for PSS, \$306,000 for the Board of Education, and \$500,000 for the technical education program.

The Senate, for its part, approved \$36.4 million for PSS, \$286,588 for BOE, and \$500,000 for technical education program.

TWO

From Page 1

and the CNMI government. The agreement calls for the initial payment of \$800,000 to MRC and \$2.2 million to be paid out over 20 years.

Benavente said the agreement’s approval must take place no later than Nov. 29, the resumption of the arbitration. He said that failure to accept the settlement would prompt MRC to reinstate its claim of over \$5 million.

Based on the agreement, the \$2.2 million can be paid through the operating revenues of Outer Cove Marina or through tax credit counted as a dollar-for-dollar against the tax obligations of specified Pellegrino companies.

The settlement approval would also allow the government immediate access to the facility.

The House leadership, however, expressed skepticism over the deal, noting that the Legislature has no business interfering in a contractual dispute.

House leadership spokesman Charles Reyes Jr. likened the issue to the credit relief bill, which the Executive Branch had vetoed over a perceived breach of the doctrine of separation of powers.

Benavente said that, if the Legislature fails to pass the bill, this will allow the government to suffer from huge financial liabilities. He believes the Legislature still has time to act on the settlement bill.

“I am clear in the letter. We’re trying to prevent a worst-case scenario,” he said.

Business

Auction to raise money for SCC scholarship fund

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce is inviting the public to attend its Wine & Cheese Party and Celebrity Auction, to be held Saturday, Nov. 27, at AJ's Restaurant.

Proceeds from this auction will be used for the Chamber's Educational Scholarship Fund, which for the past four years has helped local students

pursue their education at a two-year or four-year college.

The \$10 cover charge includes one free beer or wine, plus great *hors d'oeuvres*. A silent auction will start at 7:30pm, with the live auction at 8pm. Valuable items will be available for people to bid on, including trip packages, gift cer-

tificates from hotels and spas, and much, much more.

"You can bid on a golf lesson, a tennis lesson, swimming lessons, and even a kite surfing lesson! And Saipan celebrities have agreed to be auctioned! You can bid for a dinner with the Governor or with the Lt. Governor. Many other celebrities

will be there as well, so be sure you don't miss this unique opportunity," the chamber said in a statement. "So bring your checkbook, your credit card, or cash and come for a great auction Saturday at 7:30pm at AJ's Restaurant."

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce is the largest private business organi-

zation in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Through business leadership and membership involvement in community issues, the Chamber says it hopes to continue developing its role "as a beacon for good business" in the islands, the Pacific region and in business communities abroad.

Verizon to hold after-hours sale Friday

Are you getting ready for the holiday season? Wondering what type of gift you should get for your loved ones? If so, then come on down to the Verizon After-Hours Sale on Friday, Nov. 26, 2004 to find the perfect gift!

The special event will begin at 6pm and will last until 9pm at the Chalan Laulau customer service center on Middle Road. There will be great gift ideas and activities going on so this is an event you don't want to miss.

Be sure to mark your calendar so you can be in on the action the day after Thanksgiving when great deals will be offered at Verizon. For instance, the Kyocera 2235 and the Modotel will be on sale for only \$59.95. These packages include a \$10 calling card, a car charger, and a leather case. Accessories will be provided while supplies last so be sure to be there early to avail of these great deals!

For those of you who are tired of your existing cell phones and would like to trade it in for a new unit, then bring in your cell phone with the wall charger and replace it with either the Kyocera 2235 or the Modotel for only \$50. A \$20 prepaid card will also be included with this package deal. Your phone does not have to be in working condition to avail of this reduced rate. Just bring your unit in and Verizon will offer you a phone that is right for you!



Kyocera SE-47

The Kyocera SE-47 is a dual-band CDMA phone—Kyocera's first model with a sliding form factor. Additional features include a 65,000-color display, BREW, 1xRTT high-speed data, speaker phone, and voice dialing.

Unlike the rest of the deals happening during the event, the popular Kyocera Slider cell phone will be on sale throughout the day for only \$145.95, beginning at 8am until 5pm. The special rate for the Kyocera Slider will resume during the after-hours sale so be sure to drop by to get your phone during the promotional event if you do not have time to come in during regular working hours. There are some conditions that

apply for this camera phone unit.

Anyone who purchases a cell phone will receive a free gift during the evening. In addition, they will also have a chance to win a \$100 prepaid cellular calling card through the Verizon putt-for-minutes game.

The holiday season is fast approaching so be sure to be at Verizon's after-hours sale. For more information on these great deals, about other Verizon promotions, or if you would like to purchase a Verizon phone today, call 234-7143 for more details.

Verizon would like to wish everyone in the CNMI a safe and happy holiday season! (PR)

Experts fear price pressures could worsen

WASHINGTON (AP)—After years of relative calm on the inflation front, Americans are being battered by \$2-a-gallon gasoline, rising food prices and higher medical bills. And there are fears that price pressures could worsen in 2005.

The problem came into sharp focus last week when the government reported that wholesale prices increased in October by the largest amount in more than 14 years, and prices at the retail level recorded the biggest gain since May.

At the same time, energy prices experienced another jump, climbing at an annual rate of 22.5 percent through October. This has contributed to inflation's rising at a 3.9 percent annual rate this year, compared with 1.9 percent in 2003.

Inflationary pressures have led some economists to worry about a possible nightmare scenario: The dollar weakens dramatically, which drives up import prices; as terrorists attack overseas oil production facilities, which drives up energy prices; and like that, America's productivity miracle, a main reason for moderate inflation in recent years, disappears.

Economists acknowledge this is a worst-case scenario. Still, they say some shock is likely.

"If my inflation projection for next year goes haywire, it will most likely be because of external factors such as geopolitical tensions or terrorism that we have no control over," said Sung Won Sohn, chief economist at Wells Fargo in Minneapolis.

Some economists see inflationary pressures next year that will result directly from Bush administration policies on the dollar.

The administration insists it favors a strong dollar yet has done nothing to check the greenback's slide over the past three years. This decline could help combat the widening U.S. trade deficit by making American products cheaper abroad and imports pricier in this country.

Treasury Secretary John Snow and other U.S. officials have pressed China to sever its currency's direct link to the dollar. U.S. manufacturers contend that practice has undervalued the Chinese currency by as much as 40 percent and given China a substantial advantage against U.S. competitors.

If China should allow financial markets to set the value of its currency, that could mean steep price increases for the billions of dollars in imported Chinese products—from sneakers to high-tech

electronics—that U.S. consumers have grown to love.

The threat of higher inflation will come not only from China but other Asian countries. They fear a loss of export sales because of China's currency manipulation, so they have managed their currencies to keep them from rising against the dollar.

"Once the Chinese revalue, almost three-fourths of consumer goods imported into the United States will see price increases," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Economy.com. He said a change in China's currency policies was likely next year and could raise U.S. inflation rates by at least one-half a percentage point.

Other economists play down the impact of revaluation and see a potential offsetting positive development: global textile quotas will be lifted in January, which should increase supplies and lower clothing prices in the United States.

Analysts note the dollar already has fallen by about 26 percent since early 2002 against a market basket of major currencies while import prices have risen only slightly. Foreign producers, not wanting to lose U.S. market share, have been absorbing much of the difference from a falling dollar.

Nations agree on Iraqi debt write-off

PARIS (AP)—Major economic powers agreed to write off \$31 billion of Iraqi debt on Sunday in a major breakthrough for U.S.-led efforts to get Iraq's economy back on its feet.

Months of intensive lobbying by Washington finally paid off when the other 18 members of the Paris Club agreed to wipe 80 percent of the \$39 billion that Iraq owes them. The cut represents about a quarter of Iraq's total international debt.

Iraqi Finance Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi hailed what he called a "historic agreement," reached after six days of talks in the French capital.

"This money is needed for Iraq not only because Iraq is a ruined country but because Iraq is an important player internationally," Abdul-Mahdi said. "What will happen in Iraq will affect politically and economically the Middle East and the world."

U.S. Treasury Secretary John Snow also welcomed the debt cut as a "real milestone." Speaking to reporters after a meeting in Berlin of finance officials from the Group of 20 industrial and developing nations, he said it "shows the trans-Atlantic alliance remains a strong force for good in the world."

The United States had been pressing for as much as 95 percent of Iraq's Paris Club debt to be written off, arguing that it was hindering postwar reconstruction efforts that are already challenged by the ongoing war against armed insurgents.

But the three-stage deal announced Sunday also represents a significant concession by countries that opposed the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, such as

France, Germany and Russia, which had expressed reluctance to forgive much more than half of its debt.

French President Jacques Chirac said in June that going any further could be seen as unfair to poorer countries with heavy international liabilities but without Iraq's oil wealth.

In a sign that a compromise was near, however, German Finance Minister Hans Eichel publicly endorsed an 80 percent write-off on Saturday after talks with Snow.

France, which has been pushing to improve ties with Washington since President George W. Bush's re-election earlier this month, also backed the proposal, and Russia eventually followed suit Sunday after a further night of talks.

Paris Club chairman Jean-Pierre Jouyet said 30 percent of Iraq's Paris Club debt would be wiped immediately under the deal struck Sunday, with a further 30 percent canceled when Iraq agrees on a reform program with the International Monetary Fund, expected next year.

The final 20 percent will be forgiven upon completion of the IMF program in 2008, the chairman said, reducing Iraq's Paris Club debt to \$7.8 billion.

Jouyet said the club had also "shown its flexibility" by agreeing to a three-year waiver of repayments on the remaining debt. "Iraq will be able to concentrate its entire resources on reconstruction," he said.

Jouyet, Snow and Abdul-Mahdi all called for similar levels of Iraqi debt forgiveness from non-Paris Club lenders, to which Iraq currently owes another \$80 billion.

Gas drops 5 cents on lower consumption

CAMARILLO, Calif. (AP)—A seasonal drop in consumption and lower crude oil prices contributed to a dip in prices at the gas pump over the past two weeks, an industry analyst said Sunday.

Between Nov. 5 and Friday, the average national price for all grades of gasoline dropped to \$1.99, down 5 cents from the previous two weeks, said Trilby Lundberg, who publishes the semimonthly Lundberg Survey of 7,000 gas stations across the country.

Prices for all grades have dropped nearly 8 cents over the past four weeks, she said.

The biggest seller, self-serve regular, had an average national price of \$1.96 per gallon, down just over 5 cents. Mid-grade was \$2.06 a gallon, down 5 cents, while premium was \$2.16 per gallon, down 5 cents.

Of the cities surveyed, San Francisco

led the nation in pump prices. The average price for a gallon of self-serve regular was \$2.32. The best bargain was St. Louis, Mo., where the average price for self-serve regular was \$1.67.

In California, the average price for self-serve regular dropped more than eight cents per gallon to about \$2.29. The survey included an average of pump prices from Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Bakersfield, Fresno, Sacramento and Stockton.

Lundberg said gas prices have been declining because of lower crude oil prices and because of a traditional dip in gasoline consumption in the winter months.

"The short-term pump price prospects are for more declines," Lundberg said, adding that she doesn't expect the price of crude oil to increase in the near future.

Asia

World



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Life & Style

Does backlash loom against opinion news?

By **DAVID BAUDER**
AP TELEVISION WRITER

Is it time to turn down the volume on TV news? A handful of developments this fall suggest a brewing backlash against opinionated news, most personified by those cable segments that set people up to argue political points, or outshout each other.

One event drew a lot of attention: Jon Stewart's public scolding of CNN's "Crossfire" hosts. Others received little notice, like ABC News President David Westin's impassioned defense of objective reporting in a speech delivered at Harvard University.

Take a stopwatch to a day's coverage on a cable news network and measure how much time is spent on people talking about the news than on actual reporting, Westin said. Compare that to five years ago and he bets there's a lot less time spent on reporting today.

"There are very understandable reasons why," he said in an interview. "It is easier and cheaper and, frankly, more vivid and attractive to an audience to put on very strong-

ly expressed opinions."

TV executives are rewarded for it, too. Fox News Channel dominates its industry due largely to an opinionated prime-time lineup that took its cue from the growth of talk radio in the 1990s. "Hardball" is MSNBC's most popular show.

But Westin said there's a danger to repeatedly set up two people to argue a point without any real investigation into which view has more credence. Sometimes one side gets more attention than it deserves, he said.

"It looks like it's fair and balanced, and therefore is accurate," he said.

Instead of letting both sides simply trade accusations, ABC's "Nightline" tried to reconstruct events that happened in Vietnam 35 years ago when the Swift Boat veterans' accusations against John Kerry became a campaign issue, he said.

It was a disgust over this kind of format that fueled Stewart's cranky appearance on "Crossfire" Oct. 15, where he got into a bitter and personal tussle with Tucker Carlson.

Cable news has become a

street fight, Stewart later said on "60 Minutes."

"What has become rewarded in political discourse is the extremity of viewpoint," he said. "People like the conflict. Conflict, baby! It sells. 'Crossfire'! 'Hardball'! Shut up! You shut up!"

Sam Feist, CNN's senior executive producer for political programming, said he sees a place for opinion within a 24-hour news network. He doesn't agree that CNN has cut down on its reporting.

"I don't see CNN becoming the all-talk network," he said. "Nor should CNN be like Headline News."

Los Angeles Times columnist Michael Kinsley, a former "Crossfire" host, wrote this month that he's been pitching another approach. Instead of having opposing camps simply argue, the hosts' job should be to push them toward a common ground.

"The idea, in a word, 'Cease-Fire,'" he wrote.

So far, no takers.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism noted an interesting parallel trend in its studies of campaign coverage and pub-

lic opinion about the news. It characterized only 14 percent of newspaper and TV campaign stories this year as being straight news reporting. The bulk fit reporting into some narrative theme; President Bush tries to recover from his poor first debate performance, for instance.

During the 2000 campaign, the journalism think tank characterized 29 percent more of the stories as straight news, said Tom Rosenstiel, the project's director.

"The press becoming more interpretive doesn't mean it's become more ideological," he said. "But it may reinforce the

suspicion of the public that the press is writing what it thinks. It could encourage the suspicion of bias even though it's not evidence of it."

Westin saw the public's raw nerves in action last spring, when ABC News was accused of launching a political attack on President Bush with the "Nightline" special where names of Americans killed in Iraq were read. There was no political motivation, he said.

When ABC News is attacked, Westin typically asks critics to specifically point out any errors. "Almost uniformly what I get

back is, 'Well, everyone knows that you're biased,'" he said.

This all contributes to the idea of red states and blue states standing apart, its citizens glaring at each other.

Research this year showed how the nation's ideological divide had spread to news choices: By wide margins, Bush supporters favored Fox News Channel and Kerry backers turned to CNN. Some critics suggested the U.S. news marketplace could soon more resemble Britain's, with more news organizations that don't disguise a partisan bent.

Fate not kind to 'Apprentice' team leaders

NEW YORK (AP)—Maybe it doesn't pay to be a project manager on "The Apprentice." Chris Russo, 31, is the latest to be fired by Donald Trump on the business-themed NBC reality show.

On Thursday's episode, Russo led the Apex team to a big loss during a bridal store task. Apex made a profit of \$1,060.47 selling wedding gowns and accessories while the Mosaic team banked \$12,788.94.

"I can't believe you led the team so badly," Trump told Russo before firing him.

The stockbroker from Long Island followed in the footsteps (out of Trump Tower and into a waiting taxi) of Jennifer Crisafulli, Pamela Day, John Willenborg, Elizabeth Jarosz and Raj Bhakta, who stepped up to lead and were then booted. That's six project managers out of the 10 fired candidates so far this season.

"The project manager is supposed to delegate the tasks," Russo told The Associated Press Friday. "But when (competitors) see one of the (managers) falter, they just swoop over them like vultures."

During the second season of "The Apprentice," most project managers have been selected at random by team members. However, Russo was picked by Trump to lead Apex after Russo told the real-estate mogul during the previous week's boardroom scene that his team didn't gel.



Chris Russo is shown during the Thursday, Nov. 11, 2004, episode of NBC's "The Apprentice," in this undated photo supplied by NBC.

"My big mouth was a ploy to become the project manager," he said. "Obviously, if I knew it was a wedding task, I would've kept my mouth closed."

Russo chalks up his unmotivated leadership - he told his team the task was "impossible"—to illness.

"The truth is I was sick," he said. "On the previous task, we had been working in the rain. That's not an excuse. That's just the reality."

Russo is feeling much better now. He's gained an apprentice of his own. Russo and his wife had their first child nine weeks ago.

obit

Life & Style

Bali drive leaves Saipan residents lightheaded

By ARIN GREENWOOD
SPECIAL TO THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

It was late December, and Brian and I were sharing a plate of boiled vegetables in peanut sauce at a cafe in the seaside town of Candidasa on the Indonesian isle of Bali. We were disagreeing about where to go for New Year's Eve. Both of us thought we should celebrate the holiday somewhere special, but we couldn't agree on what that meant.

Brian thought we ought to go to a group of three islands in Lombok called the Gilis, small, coral-fringed islands with white sandy beaches, clear water, coral reefs, brilliantly colored fish and superb snorkeling.

"We live on a small, coral-fringed island with white beaches and superb snorkeling," I said. "We need to come all the way to Bali for that?"

Brian looked hurt. "I like our island," he said.

We live on Saipan, and I like it too. But I felt strongly that traveling thousands of miles for what we have at home was missing a serious point.

"I want adventure," I said. "I

want to do something that's going to take me out of my comfort zone." I was frustrated because we'd already spent a week in Bali doing nothing but pleasant, comfortable things.

The look on Brian's face said, "Who is this woman?" I relented. We were in Bali for only two weeks, but I hoped to be on the boyfriend's good side for a lot longer.

"Let's go for a day trip somewhere today, and then we'll decide where to go for New Year's," I suggested.

Brian agreed, and we set out in our rented car, a cardboard box on wheels.

Twisty road, crazy drivers

The drive was as frightening and scenic as all of Bali's drives. The road was narrow and twisty and went by indescribably gorgeous hillside vistas, oceans and temples. We saw a lot of women carrying incredible loads atop their heads: One carried a wheelbarrow, another a pile of bricks. Most loads were simpler: bushels of rice stalks and baskets of fruit.

Motorbikes were everywhere, some carrying two, three, four or even five people on a single bike. They thronged the roads, passing one another in the middle of the highway or in the opposite lane, barely avoiding head-on collisions. Cars and trucks did the same.

Brian and I cheered up as we drove: The crazy drivers brought out our appreciation for living. We passed the Bat Cave temple, Pura Goa Lawah, where the day before we had enjoyed looking at thousands of tiny sacred bats hanging in a cave at one of Bali's most important temples. In front of the temple, a man wearing a sharp tan outfit was standing next to a motorbike. He waved at us. We waved back.

A moment later, the waving man was on his motorbike and was passing the line of traffic behind us. He pulled up by Brian's open window. "Pull over," he said. Brian pulled over.

The man stopped his bike behind our car and walked up to the window. He was wearing a fitted khaki button-down shirt with a sewn-on name tag that said "G. Suarta."

"Why did you not stop?" he



asked. "I waved you over and you kept driving."

Brian looked sad. "I didn't realize you were pulling me over," he said. G. Suarta looked unimpressed.

"How fast were you driving?" G. Suarta asked.

"I don't know," Brian said.

"Give me your international driver's license," G. Suarta ordered.

Indonesian jail time?

Brian pulled out his Saipan driver's license. Saipan is, technically, part of the United States, but a Saipan driver's license looks a lot more like a fake ID made by a drunken college student than it looks like a real driver's license. And anyway, G. Suarta wanted to see an international driver's license, which Brian didn't have.

"You need to have an international driver's license to drive a car in Bali," said G. Suarta. "Where is yours?" Brian said he didn't have one. G. Suarta looked angry.

"You will have to come with me to the police station," he said. "You have done three things wrong: You were speeding; you did not pull over when I waved you down; and you do not have an international driver's license. Follow me."

G. Suarta got back on his motorbike, made a quick U-turn and sped into traffic. Brian waited for a hole in the traffic, then turned around into it, but we had lost G. Suarta.

Brian then made another U-turn and started heading back toward the hill carvings. I turned around every few seconds to see if G. Suarta was coming back for us. He was.

He pulled up next to Brian's window again and said, "Why didn't you follow me?"

"I tried," Brian said. G. Suarta told him to try harder, then made another U-turn and sped off again. Brian spun around to follow, but when he was perpendicular to both lanes we heard a loud "smack" in the side of the

cardboard car. Brian said some unprintable things as the motorbiker who had hit the side of our car rubbed his head. A crowd immediately congregated.

"Are you OK?" Brian said to the motorbiker, who looked down at his motorbike. Its front was crumpled. Luckily, the motorbiker was not. G. Suarta appeared in the crowd. He directed Brian and the motorbiker to follow him, which we did in a kind

Now this is No. 4 problem." He asked for Brian's driver's license again and started writing down the information on it. I kept wondering what Indonesian jail would be like and how long it would take to learn Indonesian sufficiently to talk with my fellow inmates.

"You damaged the motorbike. You should pay to have it repaired."

Was he asking us to bribe him?

We live on Saipan, and I like it too. But I felt strongly that traveling thousands of miles for what we have at home was missing a serious point. "I want adventure," I said. "I want to do something that's going to take me out of my comfort zone." I was frustrated because we'd already spent a week in Bali doing nothing but pleasant, comfortable things.

of shame parade.

We parked our car, which now had a smashed door. The half-crumpled motorbike was parked next to us. We all followed G. Suarta into the station, where Brian and I were directed into a small room. G. Suarta sat at one side of a table; we sat at the other.

"Where are you from?" he asked. Rather than explaining where the small island we live on is [near Guam], we just said we were from the States.

"I have a cousin who lives in North Carolina," G. Suarta said.

"Great," I said, trying to be charming. "Have you been to visit?"

"No." He turned to Brian. "You shouldn't have turned there. You were on a curve. It was very dangerous. Obviously."

Brian looked distressed. "Why didn't you stop the traffic? Isn't that your job—to stop traffic?"

G. Suarta was impervious. "That was a bad place to turn.

"How much will that cost?" Brian asked.

"Maybe 150,000 rupiah," G. Suarta said. It was less than \$20. I stopped worrying about jail and started feeling grateful for cops who could be bought off for very little money.

Brian and I came up with the money. G. Suarta called the motorbiker into the room.

G. Suarta handed him the money. "I want you to take note that I am giving this man all the money. I am not taking a bribe. The Indonesian police do not take bribes."

The motorbiker took the money and left. G. Suarta asked Brian to sign a scrap of paper with nothing on it except the information from his driver's license. Then we got out of there and resumed our drive south.

We were both quiet for a while.

"I think the beach sounds quite nice after all," I finally said.

"Doesn't it?" Brian answered.

guerrero obit

Letter from Lincoln's killer sets record

BOSTON (AP)—A letter written by President Lincoln's assassin two months before the 1865 slaying sold at auction Sunday for a record \$68,000.

In the letter, dated Feb. 9, 1865, John Wilkes Booth asks a friend to send him a picture of himself "with cane & black cravat"—the one later

used in his wanted poster.

The previous high for a Booth letter was \$38,000, according to Stuart Whitehurst, vice president of Skinner Inc. auctioneers.

The buyer was Joe Maddalena, a Beverly Hills-based historical document dealer. Maddalena, who bid by phone,

said Booth "is the rarest American autograph."

"When he killed Lincoln, anybody who had any relationship with him burned their letters, because they were so afraid they would be linked to him," Maddalena said. "There are only 300 known letters and he must have written thou-

sands and thousands."

Whitehurst estimated that only 17 Booth letters remain in private hands. This letter was addressed to family friend Orlando Tompkins of Boston, an apothecary and part owner of Boston Theatre. Booth tells Tompkins he "will get any letter sent to Fords Theatre."

Booth was retrieving his mail at the theater on April 14, 1865, when he first heard that Lincoln would be attending "Our American Cousin" that evening. Booth, a Confederate sympathizer and former actor, returned during the play to assassinate the president.

"The fact that Lincoln had just essentially won the (Civil War) made the crime even more shocking," Whitehurst said. "So much of what he could have done to heal the nation was ahead of him."

Also on the block at the fine books and manuscript auction Sunday was memorabilia from President John F. Kennedy's personal doctor, Janet Graham Travell, the first woman to

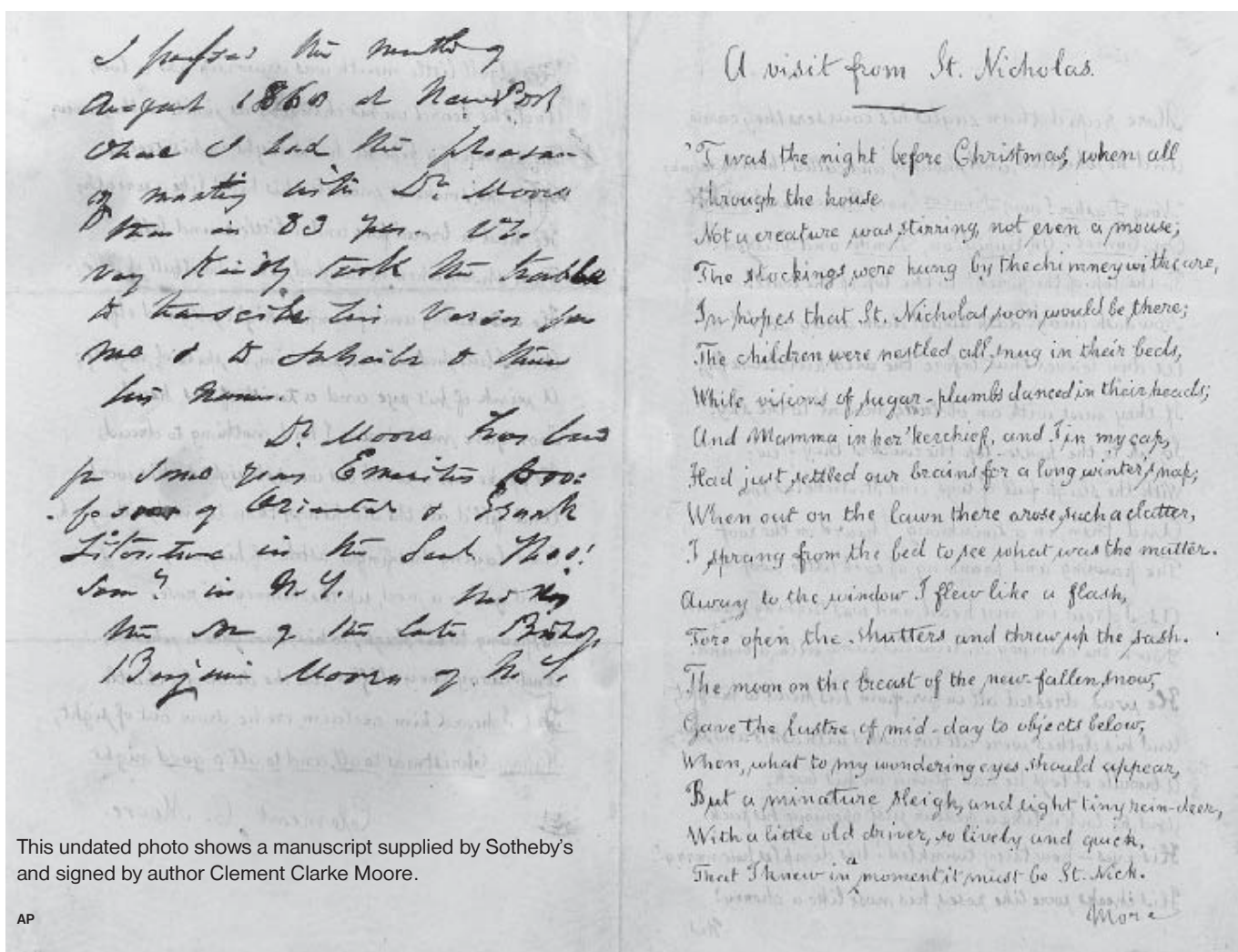
serve as White House physician. Kennedy began seeing her in 1955 for the back pain that plagued him throughout his adult life.

He said her treatments gave him "new hope for a life free from crutches if not from backache."

The autographed copy he gave her of his book, "Profiles in Courage," sold for \$5,500. The rocking chair, known as the "Kennedy Rocker," which served as the prototype for the specially made chair that helped the president's back pain, sold for \$11,000.

Travell's White House medical bag sold for \$2,700.

Kennedy was assassinated 41 years ago Monday.



This undated photo shows a manuscript supplied by Sotheby's and signed by author Clement Clarke Moore.

Sotheby's to auction famed Christmas poem

NEW YORK (AP)—An autographed copy of the classic poem that begins with the familiar line "'Twas the night before Christmas" will be auctioned at Sotheby's this holiday season.

The handwritten manuscript, signed by author Clement Clarke Moore, is one of just four known autographed copies, according to Sotheby's. It is expected to sell for between \$200,000 and \$300,000 when auctioned in New York on Dec. 3.

The poem is as much a part of

the holiday tradition as Christmas trees, warm plum pudding, Santa Claus and eggnog.

Moore wrote "Visit From St. Nicholas" on Christmas Eve in 1822, while on a trip to the Bowery in Manhattan to buy the family's Christmas turkey. He read it to his family that evening, according to Moore family history.

A family friend, Harriet Butler, sent a copy to the Sentinel, a newspaper in Troy, N.Y., that ran it the following Christmas.

Moore apparently did not acknowledge authorship of the poem for more than 15 years and then only reluctantly when it was published in a collection of poetry by Charles Fenno Hoffman, according to Matthew Weigman, a Sotheby's spokesman.

Moore, also the author of the two-volume "Compendious Lexicon of the Hebrew Language," is believed to have thought the poem was too light for his reputation as a Hebrew scholar. But it was the Christ-

mas poem that made him famous, Weigman said.

The verse narrative has been memorized by generations of school children. Its most familiar lines are its opening couplet, "'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house / Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse," and its closing lines: "But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight, 'Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night.'"

WALLACE

NY crowds line up to see renovated MoMA

NEW YORK (AP)—Thousands of people waited in a line that wrapped around a city block Saturday to file into the reopened doors of the renovated and expanded Museum of Modern Art.

The museum opened for a free viewing after a 2 1/2-year renovation. While much of the collection was on display at a former staple factory in Queens during that time, the \$425 million reconstruction nearly doubled the museum's gallery space.

"I missed it," said Ellen Hofstatter, 55, who waited more than an hour to get in before heading straight for her favorite

painting, Vincent van Gogh's "The Starry Night."

Many arrived hours before the 10 a.m. opening to be among the first to see the museum's collection of world class modern and contemporary art. At 10 a.m. sharp, the doors swung open to cheers.

Tad Davis and Susan Vosburgh, a couple from Atlantic Highlands, N.J., celebrating their 10th wedding anniversary, received a lifetime membership for being the first new visitors.

Others waiting near the end of the long line of thousands said they expected the wait to be worth it.

"I would rather be at the front, but I wanted to come today because I am poor and can't afford \$20 to get in," said Suzanne Velovic, 61, referring to the new adult admissions price, which The New York Times has labeled "an appalling and cynical figure."

Inside, museum director Glenn D. Lowry defended the new prices - \$20 for adults, \$16 for seniors and \$12 for students. Many school groups will be invited without charge and admission will be free to all on Fridays from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Lowry said.

"We have endeavored to balance our financial needs with obligations to run a balanced

budget," he said. The increases are blamed in part on increased insurance fees and other fixed costs, Lowry said.

The museum's new design by Japanese architect Yushio Taniguchi retains architectural elements of the old building while transformed the galleries.

"I hope we have accomplished creating an entirely new museum, rooted in the old museum, where the collection shines as never before," Lowry said.

Dozens of visitors expressed satisfaction with the effort and the layout that groups most artworks are arranged in chronological order.

It's lord of the ring vs. lady of the ring

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR ABBY: "Deb in Knoxville" asked who should buy the ring if the woman proposes. I think the groom should buy the ring for the bride, and the bride should buy the ring for the groom, no matter who proposes. It should be their gift to each other.

JOYFUL IN ALPHARETTA, GA.

DEAR JOYFUL: My ears are "ringing" from the many comments I've received regarding that letter. Read on:

DEAR ABBY: Your answer to "Deb in Knoxville" was right on. You advised her that if the man is a gentleman, he should buy it. And if he refuses, she should enter the marriage with her eyes wide open and no illusions about what her future will be.

Even though my husband popped the question to me, he never bought me a ring. It was an indication of what was to come. He is the world's worst cheapskate.

I can count on one hand the number of gifts he has given me over the years. He is equally withholding emotionally. When I was single, I never thought that such things were important in a relationship. I was wrong. It's been a lonely life.

LONELY IN DIXIE

DEAR LONELY: In your case, the lack of gifts is less important than the absence of what they stand for. You have my sympathy.

DEAR ABBY: My girlfriend tells me that it is tradition that the man buys the woman a ring, and the woman buys the man a watch. What a great tradition! Have you heard of this?

BOB IN CHICAGO

DEAR BOB: No, so I called Dawn Moore, the West Coast regional director of Chopard Jewelers. She informed me that a wristwatch is the "traditional offering" from the woman to the man at the time of the engagement or the wedding. (What a clever way of ensuring he makes it to the church on time!)

DEAR ABBY: "Deb in Knoxville" asked who should buy the ring if the woman proposes. You replied that you're old-fashioned, and the man should buy it if he's a gentleman. I disagree! If the woman asks, she should buy the ring. Not only that, but she should present that ring to him. What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ENGAGER

DEAR ENGAGER: Thank you for stating the opposing point of view.

DEAR ABBY: I proposed to my longtime boyfriend and bought him an engagement ring. I didn't care if I received one or not. He asked if I wanted one as well, and I declined. Because of pressure from family and friends, he finally insisted.

Abby, there is so much old-fashioned peer pressure on the man. When we announced our engagement, I made the mistake of saying that I had been the one to propose. People would gawk at him as though he had been the one holding up the wedding plans, and I had to somehow get the ball rolling by proposing to him. It was like they thought less of him somehow. I think it embarrassed him, which was stupid because he was ready to be married long before I was. (I was divorced and afraid of making another mistake.)

When I felt ready, I decided to surprise him and propose. He was loving and patient with me—and it's unfair that people regard him as someone who had to be poked and prodded into making a commitment.

I think that if a woman proposes, the same rules should apply as if the situation were reversed. It's up to both of them to decide about the rings. The responsibility should be shared because they are both equals in the relationship.

SMILING IN CANADA

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.



Dear Abby

'National Treasure' outdraws 'SpongeBob'

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Nicolas Cage's treasure hunt soaked up more box-office cash than a cartoon sponge. Cage's "National Treasure" debuted as the No. 1 weekend movie with \$35.3 million, coming in just ahead of "The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie," which opened in second with \$33.5 million, according to studio estimates Sunday.

After two weekends in the No. 1 spot, the animated superhero tale "The Incredibles" slipped to third with \$26.8 million. The film has made \$177.8 million in three weeks.

Tom Hanks' Christmas adventure "The Polar Express" came in fourth with \$15.2 million in its second weekend. Costing \$170 million to make, the movie has had a cool reception from audiences, taking in \$51 million in 10 days.

After a healthy \$8.7 million debut in narrower release of 530 theaters a week earlier, Renee Zellweger's "Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason" had a so-so expansion, taking in \$10.1 million in 2,450 cinemas. A sequel to the 2001 romantic comedy hit, the movie came in at No. 5.

Hollywood had a second straight weekend of rising revenues after a slump that lasted most of the fall. The top 12 movies grossed \$144.8 million, up 15 percent from the same weekend last year.

Industry officials hope the strong revenues provide a good springboard into Thanksgiving, one of Hollywood's busiest weekends. A crowd of family films—including Tim Allen's "Christmas With the Kranks," opening Wednesday—should prove a powerful draw over the long holiday weekend, said Paul Dergarabedian, president of box-office tracker Exhibitor Relations.

"With this many family films, it's going to be a bloodbath," Dergarabedian said. "'The Incredibles' is going to be a huge factor, 'Spongy' is going to be a huge factor. Even 'Polar Express,' which people were trashing on, will be a factor because it's a holiday movie."

"National Treasure," Cage's fourth collaboration with pro-

ducer Jerry Bruckheimer, centers on a plot to steal the Declaration of Independence to obtain the hidden clues to a colossal fortune stashed by the Founding

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at North American theaters, according to Exhibitor Relations Co. Inc. Final figures will be released Monday.

1. "National Treasure," \$35.3 million.
2. "The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie," \$33.5 million.
3. "The Incredibles," \$26.8 million.
4. "The Polar Express," \$15.2 million.
5. "Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason," \$10.1 million.
6. "After the Sunset," \$5.3 million.
7. "Ray," \$4.6 million.
8. "The Grudge," \$3.8 million.
9. "Seed of Chucky," \$3.1 million.
10. "Saw," \$3 million.

Fathers.

Unlike Bruckheimer action flicks aimed at the adult-male crowd, "National Treasure" has a softer PG rating to appeal to family audiences. The movie drew solidly among all age groups and scored well among women, too, said Chuck Viane, head of distribution for Disney, which released the film.

"Jerry's core audience goes in looking for a great piece of action, and it delivered on that," Viane said. But the PG rating "expands the size of your audience so you get a much bigger spread of folks coming in."

"The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie" is the first big-screen adventure for the Nickelodeon TV cartoon bottom-dweller, a cheery sponge who lives among his aquatic pals. The movie was generally well-received by critics, unlike "National Treasure."

A big part of SpongeBob's appeal is that he is eternally optimistic, presenting a good role model for children, said

Wayne Lewellen, head of distribution for Paramount, which released the movie.

In limited release, Pedro Almodovar's "Bad Education" had a stellar opening, grossing \$147,366 in three theaters. The movie's convoluted plot centers on the relationship of two boys whose budding romance is destroyed by a jealous priest.

Rivera sells NJ weekly newspaper

RED BANK, N.J. (AP)—TV personality and journalist Geraldo Rivera has ended his 14-year ownership of the Two River Times, selling the weekly newspaper to a couple from Rumson.

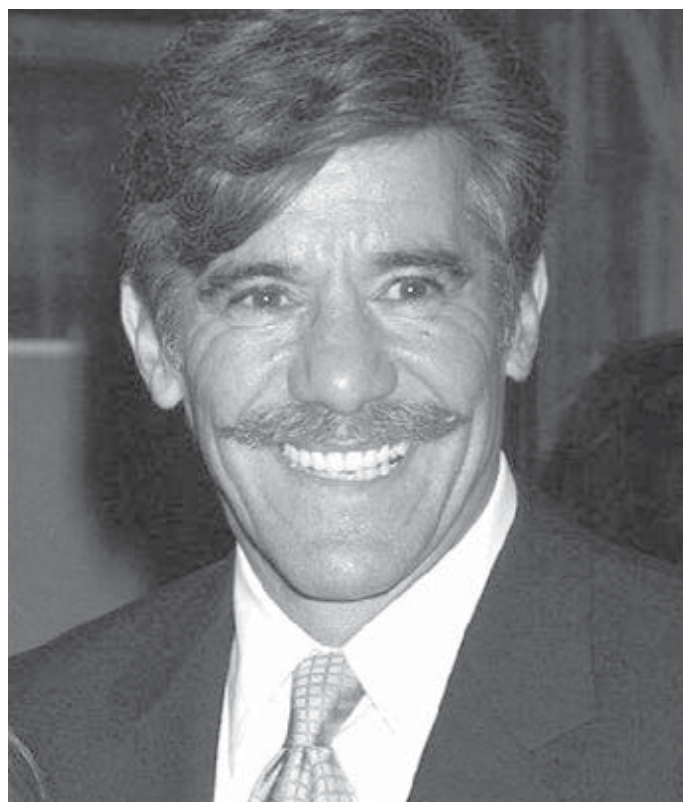
Michael J. Gooch and Diane Gooch wouldn't disclose how much they spent to buy the 20,000-circulation newspaper. Diane Gooch has taken over as publisher.

Rivera, who moved out of the Red Bank area several years ago after his divorce, said in a statement Thursday that the newspaper needed "a more connected and locally based hand on the helm than mine."

Gooch is the chairman, chief executive and founder of brokerage company GFI Group.

Geraldo Rivera arrives to a New York film premiere in a file photo from Sept. 7, 2003.

AP



Diana Ross says motherhood defines her



Diana Ross arrives for the 32nd annual American Music Awards, Nov. 14, 2004, at the Shrine Auditorium in this Los Angeles file photo.

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP)—Diana Ross looked every inch the diva as she pulled up to Musictech College in a black stretch limo and got out wrapped in a thick fur coat and wearing dark sunglasses. Striding across a specially rented red carpet leading to the school door, Ross beamed as she accepted a bouquet of white roses and signed record albums held out for her autograph.

But inside the small music conservatory, where a new full scholarship was named in her honor Saturday, Ross told an audience of more than 100 students that it's not divadom that defines her—it's motherhood.

"I'm more a mom than I am a celebrity, even though I know you know me as a celebrity. I'm a mother first," she said.

Ross, who has had her ups and downs in nearly 40 years in the music business, said she has always believed in herself.

"I actually don't remember ever not believing in myself," said Ross, 60. "I was brought up in the Brewster projects in Detroit and I always knew that there was a way out."

Vanilla Ice reunited with wallaroo, goat

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. (AP)—Bucky Buckaroo the wallaroo and Pancho the goat may soon be back in the custody of their rapper owner Vanilla Ice.

Bucky and Pancho escaped more than a week ago and spent several days frolicking in the streets and wooded areas of St. Lucie County in southeast Florida. They made a run for it after Pancho nudged open an unlocked door with his head and the two broke out of a relative's backyard.

The animals were captured Nov. 13 after the 60-pound wallaroo—a cross between a wallaby and a kangaroo—scratched a woman's car. But Vanilla Ice, whose real name is Robert van Winkle, was out of town and could not immediately claim them.

When the rapper arrived at animal control offices Friday, officials fined him \$220 because his permit for the pets had expired. So Bucky and Pancho are staying temporarily with an exotic animal breeder.

"I'm pretty shocked at all the attention," the rapper said, holding up clippings of newspaper stories on the incident. "They get more attention here than they do at home."

He says he expects he'll be able to reclaim the animals after he pays another fine to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Vanilla Ice climbed to fame with his 1990 rap hit "Ice Ice, Baby." Of late, he has appeared on the WB's "Surreal Life" reality show, which featured celebrities whose fame had faded.

Pastimes





TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

MLB STANDINGS

AMERICAN LEAGUE

East Division

	W	L	Pct.	GB
New York	90	53	.629	-
Boston	86	56	.606	31/2
Baltimore	65	76	.461	24
Tampa Bay	61	80	.433	28
Toronto	59	84	.413	31

Central Division

Minnesota	82	60	.577	-
Chicago	72	70	.507	10
Cleveland	70	73	.490	121/2
Detroit	64	77	.454	171/2
Kansas City	51	91	.359	31

West Division

Oakland	83	59	.585	-
Anaheim	81	61	.570	2
Texas	78	64	.549	5
Seattle	53	89	.373	30

Yesterday's Games

Minnesota 8, Detroit 5
N.Y. Yankees 9, Baltimore 7
Texas 7, Toronto 6
Tampa Bay 7, Kansas City 2
Seattle 2, Boston 0
Anaheim 11, Chicago White Sox 0
Oakland 1, Cleveland 0

NATIONAL LEAGUE

East Division

Atlanta	84	58	.592	-
Florida	74	65	.532	81/2
Philadelphia	74	69	.517	101/2
New York	61	81	.430	23
Montreal	59	83	.415	25

Central Division

St. Louis	94	48	.662	-
Chicago	76	64	.543	17
Houston	78	66	.542	17
Pittsburgh	66	77	.462	281/2
Cincinnati	65	77	.458	29
Milwaukee	62	79	.440	311/2

West Division

Los Angeles	83	59	.585	-
San Francisco	79	65	.549	5
San Diego	76	67	.531	71/2
Colorado	62	80	.437	21
Arizona	43	100	.301	401/2

Yesterday's Games

Atlanta 9, Montreal 8, 12 innings
Philadelphia 4, N.Y. Mets 2
Milwaukee 11, Cincinnati 0
Florida 11, Chicago Cubs 1
San Diego 15, Colorado 2
St. Louis 7, Los Angeles 6
San Francisco 5, Arizona 2
Houston 5, Pittsburgh 4, 10 innings

NFL STANDINGS

AFC East

	W	L	T	Pct.
N.Y. Jets	1	0	0	1.000
New England	1	0	0	1.000
Buffalo	0	1	0	.000
Miami	0	1	0	.000

North

Cleveland	1	0	0	1.000
Pittsburgh	1	0	0	1.000
Baltimore	0	1	0	.000
Cincinnati	0	1	0	.000

South

Jacksonville	1	0	0	1.000
Tennessee	1	0	0	1.000
Houston	0	1	0	.000
Indianapolis	0	1	0	.000

West

Denver	1	0	0	1.000
San Diego	1	0	0	1.000
Kansas City	0	1	0	.000
Oakland	0	1	0	.000

NFC East

Philadelphia	1	0	0	1.000
Washington	1	0	0	1.000
Dallas	0	1	0	.000
N.Y. Giants	0	1	0	.000

North

Detroit	1	0	0	1.000
Minnesota	1	0	0	1.000
Green Bay	0	0	0	.000
Chicago	0	1	0	.000

South

Atlanta	1	0	0	1.000
Carolina	0	0	0	.000
New Orleans	0	1	0	.000
Tampa Bay	0	1	0	.000

West

Seattle	1	0	0	1.000
St. Louis	1	0	0	1.000
Arizona	0	1	0	.000
San Francisco	0	1	0	.000

Yesterday's Games

Detroit 20, Chicago 16
N.Y. Jets 31, Cincinnati 24
Pittsburgh 24, Oakland 21
San Diego 27, Houston 20
St. Louis 17, Arizona 10
Washington 16, Tampa Bay 10
Seattle 21, New Orleans 7
Jacksonville 13, Buffalo 10
Cleveland 20, Baltimore 3
Atlanta 21, San Francisco 19
Minnesota 35, Dallas 17
Philadelphia 31, N.Y. Giants 17
Denver 34, Kansas City 24

BELL CANADIAN OPEN SCORES

Final Round

(x-Won on third playoff hole)

x-Vijay Singh	68-66-72-69	275
Mike Weir	68-65-70-72	275
Joe Ogilvie	70-69-69-69	277
Justin Rose	70-70-75-63	278
Tom Lehman	74-70-70-64	278
Hunter Mahan	72-69-69-68	278
Stewart Cink	72-68-69-69	278
Robert Damron	72-71-70-66	279
Mark Hensby	70-69-70-71	280
Jesper Parnevik	69-66-71-74	280
Billy Andrade	67-75-71-68	281
David Sutherland	69-72-68-72	281
D.J. Brigman	67-74-67-73	281
Pat Perez	68-68-78-68	282
David Branshaw	71-65-75-71	282
Dean Wilson	71-70-69-72	282
Steve Lowery	70-69-70-73	282
Cliff Kresge	69-70-67-76	282
Jose Coceres	72-70-74-67	283
Arjun Atwal	71-67-75-70	283
Kenny Perry	71-67-74-71	283
Glen Day	70-69-70-74	283
Bill Haas	71-71-67-74	283
Casey Wittenberg	73-72-71-68	284
Chris DiMarco	69-71-73-71	284
Craig Perks	70-72-75-68	285
Bob Tway	74-71-70-70	285
Roland Thatcher	72-72-71-70	285
Corey Pavin	73-70-72-70	285
Bill Glasson	72-70-73-70	285
Joey Sindelar	66-73-74-72	285
Brett Quigley	69-71-73-72	285
Chad Campbell	73-68-72-72	285
David Peoples	69-70-73-73	285
Craig Barlow	67-69-75-74	285
Dudley Hart	72-73-73-68	286
David Edwards	72-69-74-71	286
Richard S. Johnson	73-70-71-72	286
Roger Tambellini	71-71-69-75	286
David Frost	73-71-71-72	287
Jason Bohn	73-70-72-72	287
Davis Love III	72-73-68-74	287
Greg Chalmers	71-72-70-74	287
Tommy Tolles	72-70-78-68	288
Esteban Toledo	76-68-72-72	288
Jonathan Byrd	72-70-69-77	288
Jim Rutledge	74-71-75-69	289
Mark Brooks	69-73-76-71	289
Fred Funk	74-70-72-73	289
Mark Wilson	74-70-71-74	289
Tim Petrovic	72-70-73-74	289
Steve Flesch	73-71-75-71	290
David Duval	71-72-76-71	290
Omar Uresti	74-70-74-72	290
Todd Fischer	71-71-75-73	290
Tag Ridings	68-76-72-74	290
Phil Mickelson	75-69-79-68	291
Jim McGovern	71-72-76-72	291
Billy Mayfair	70-74-72-75	291
Neal Lancaster	71-70-75-75	291
Garrett Willis	71-74-75-72	292
Tom Carter	72-71-76-73	292
Dennis Paulson	69-72-75-76	292
Brian Kortan	71-74-70-77	292
Paul Azinger	72-68-74-78	292
Aaron Barber	72-73-75-73	293

Jim Carter

72-69-78-74 293
Danny Briggs 69-73-77-74 293
Justin Leonard 76-66-77-74 293
Dicky Pride 72-72-77-73 294
Grant Waite 75-70-73-76 294
Larry Mize 76-68-74-76 294
David Morland IV 70-73-73-78 294
Dirk Ayers 72-71-79-73 295
Kevin Sutherland 74-71-75-75 295
John Rollins 74-71-74-76 295
Andre Stolz 71-74-77-74 296
Chris Couch 71-71-79-83 304

SPORTS TRANSACTIONS

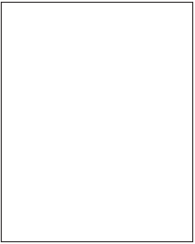
MLB

SEATTLE MARINERS-Called up LHP Randy Williams from Tacoma of the PCL.
NEW YORK METS-Placed RHP Matt Ginter on the 60-day DL. Recalled OF Victor Diaz from Norfolk of the IL.
PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES-Activated RHP Kevin Millwood from the 15-day DL.

NFL

ATLANTA FALCONS-Waived S Etric Pruitt. Signed LB Terrence Melton from the practice squad.
BUFFALO BILLS-Reached an injury settlement with QB Travis Brown.
GREEN BAY PACKERS-Signed CB Al Harris to a five-year contract extension. Released TE Steve Bush.
INDIANAPOLIS COLTS-Activated S Bob Sanders. Waived FB Cary Davis. Signed DT Jason Stewart to the practice squad.
MIAMI DOLPHINS-Released RB Fred Russell from the practice squad. Signed RB Leonard Henry to the practice squad.
MINNESOTA VIKINGS-Signed OT Mike Rosenthal to a six-year contract extension.
OAKLAND RAIDERS-Activated CB Charles Woodson. Traded DT Chris Cooper to Dallas for future considerations.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS-Waived TE Kevin Ware. Signed FB Matt Stanley from the practice squad.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS-Activated OT Walter Jones. Signed WR Jerheme Urban to the practice squad. Waived G Jerry Wunsch.

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27

Saipan Tribune

Sports

25

